

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



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THE ARTS AT SWEET BRIAR



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Instruction in art and music as intellectual disciplines and as pathways to self-expression has always been a part of the liberal arts curriculum at Sweet Briar. Today new facilities and improved resources mean that every member of the college community may enjoy some experience of all the major arts, whether as a student, an active participant, or an observer.

☞ A student may major in music, art or drama and may elect courses in creative writing or the history and composition of the dance. She can develop her own abilities as a performer by work for academic credit in the creative arts or she may join other enthusiasts in the Choir, the Dance Theatre, or the drama



club, Paint and Patches. A student in art might design and build sets for theatre productions or dance concerts; members of the Dance Theatre may invest traditional religious observances with a new meaning by their performance in a chapel service; and those whose chief joy is in making music find many opportunities to do so.

☞ Whatever shape a final performance may take—a senior recital, a painting or print, a poem or story in *The Brambler*, an experimental stage production, student-written or directed—every student in the arts knows in advance that her results will be judged with interest by a critical and responsive college audience.



☞ This audience is at once critical and responsive because it always includes those who have themselves either been active participants or observers, whose judgment has been sharpened by exposure to professional as well as amateur performances in the arts.

☞ Students and teachers alike profit by imported examples of distinguished work in the arts, such as concerts by outstanding musicians, performances and often master classes by professional actors or dancers, a variety of exhibitions of works of art, and lectures or readings by leading critics and authors.

☞ All the varied activities that together constitute The Arts at Sweet Briar were given tremendous impetus by the completion of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Fine Arts Center. Its facilities include a modern, well-equipped stage and a spacious auditorium; an art wing which has several studios and a fine library with books, periodicals, and collections of prints, photographs and slides; a music wing with practice rooms and instruments, teaching studios, and a comprehensive collection of books, records, tapes, and scores in the



music library; and a seminar room for the Writers' Workshop.

☞ Interrelationships among the arts develop easily in this setting, where students and professors study and teach, question and discuss as they explore historical, theoretical, and creative aspects of the several arts. The student with talent and a certain facility in technique soon learns that talent is not enough, that self-expression in any form of art demands having something to express, and that all her studies in the liberal arts contribute to the reservoir from which she draws inspiration. The student of history and criticism



is made more aware of the actual nature of a work of art as she gains understanding of the technical problems of execution or performance.

✿ The student in art focuses her studies on the history or practice of art, or both. The history of art from pre-historic to present times is first presented in a general introductory course. Advanced courses concentrate on particular periods and countries with integrated study of painting, sculpture and architecture. Small classes permit instructors to give individual attention to each student and in every course emphasis is placed on the development of creative interpretation.



☞ In studio work she is encouraged to develop her own ideas from her knowledge of art history and her other studies. In order to understand and appreciate the processes of the artist in history, the student in the Techniques and Materials course learns how to make all her materials. She grinds colors from pigment, makes gesso, and prepares plaster for fresco, and she gains first-hand knowledge of several techniques—encaustic, silverpoint, watercolor, oil, and acrylic. In the Graphics studio she is introduced to printmaking

and produces block prints, dry-points, engravings, and etchings.

☞ The major in art attracts many students, of whom the majority continue in their chosen field after college—as teachers, art librarians, interior decorators; in galleries and museums, in advertising and publishing firms. The world of art is wide and may be entered through many doors.

☞ Dance is an art that is treated as such, although there is no major program. As a senior who majored in English explained recently, “Dance at Sweet Briar offers the interested student an opportunity to create, to teach, to move, and to be a leader and innovator in the dance. I have found my dance experience at Sweet Briar invaluable, letting me express myself creatively. My academic courses have often given me ideas that I have been able to incorporate in dance and my work in dance has stimulated my perceptions and senses so that I am better able to understand my courses.”

☞ Students who are interested in dance, be it modern or ballet, and who have shown creative and technical ability, are invited to join the Dance Theatre.



☞ Another senior, who majored in music, offered the following appraisal: "From the moment a girl walks through the doors into the life of the music department, she is encouraged to develop her abilities through continuing practice, active composition, and frequent analysis. She benefits greatly from criticisms exchanged with her fellow students and learns from discerning professors to channel and discipline her abilities. Enrollment in the music department is a challenge to gain an outstanding musical education."

☞ Self-expression through the written word is also an art and a discipline as students discover in the Writers' Workshop. Classes are kept small and usually meet

once a week in an informal session where student work is read and thoroughly discussed. Although the emphasis is primarily on poetry and fiction, each student is free to write in whatever genre most interests her.

☞ Publication in the student literary magazine may be the first recognition for the young writer. If her work is exceptional, she is encouraged to submit it to literary periodicals outside the college or to enter regional or national writing contests.

☞ Distinguished writers are invited to Sweet Briar to discuss their work, to give readings, and to talk informally with students. In recent years these have included Harper Lee, Edward Albee, John Updike, Peter Taylor, Alfred Kazin, and poets James Dickey, A. D. Hope, William Stafford, Galway Kinnell, James Wright, Robert Bly, and Jon Silkin.

☞ To make the student actively aware of the theatre as a dynamic art, the interdepartmental major in drama offers a balanced study of its literature, history, theory, and practice. A recent graduate who is continuing her studies in theatre summed up her college experience as follows:

☞ “When I first began my studies in drama at Sweet Briar I came to realize how much there was to learn about the drama and the theatre tradition, a tradition which has its roots in the very beginnings of man’s life on earth. While I had always loved working in the theatre—mostly in an acting capacity—I viewed it as simply a hobby and something apart from my main interests. At Sweet Briar, however, I began to see that the theatre was something I could not do without.





☞ “One of my most provocative experiences as a drama major was in the actual application of my knowledge and abilities on the stage. At the same time I learned much more about the theatre, gaining respect and admiration for those proficient in playwriting, design, directing, and the many other technical aspects. I found my studies to be enriching, exciting, and most enjoyable.”

☞ Variety is the first consideration in the choice of plays produced by students under the supervision of the theatre director. The aim is to give partici-

pants and audiences exposure to outstanding plays of different periods, from Euripides to the present day. From time to time a director or designer from New York comes to Sweet Briar to assist with a theatre production and to conduct workshops in acting, directing, and design for all interested students.

☞ The essence of education in the arts can be simply stated: learning to see, not just to look; learning to hear, not only to listen; learning to move and speak and write, with purpose. Performance becomes the visible result of disciplined immersion in one or more of the arts. It is also the principal means by which the entire community is brought into the magic circle of the arts.





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Sweet Briar, Virginia